

# Recovery Update

Colleges, universities find ways to serve students

**S**EVENTEEN OF 19 LOUISIANA COLLEGES and universities shut down by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita are now open “in some fashion.” But about 28,000 people attending colleges and universities when the storms struck are no longer students.

Dr. Joseph Savoie, the state’s Commissioner of Higher Education, presented that progress report to members of District IV of the Council for the Advancement of Education. The group held its annual conference in Oklahoma City in April. Savoie is former vice president for Advancement at UL Lafayette.

“The impacted campuses fought their problems mightily. Administrators, faculty and staff – most of whom had lost their homes and many whose families were displaced – worked day and night to resuscitate their campuses,” Savoie said. “By March, seven months after Katrina and six months after Rita, all but two campuses are reopened in some fashion. Many are different in scope. All are smaller. But they are open and functional. They are serving their

10,000 displaced students from the closed campuses – at no cost and without bureaucratic red tape. Many of you accepted our students as well. Thank you,” he told the CASE members.

Schools not directly affected by the storms helped shelter more than 25,000 hurricane evacuees for weeks.

UL Lafayette’s nursing students assisted evacuees housed in the Cajundome, for instance. Child and family studies majors provided child care there. The university furnished lodging for medical personnel and offered “mini sessions” for displaced students.

“Nicholls State University and Louisiana State University served as official medical triage centers for acute care evacuees. The 800-bed medical facility at LSU was said to be the largest acute-care field hospital created in United States history,” Savoie said.

Colleges and universities that were not damaged also reached out to help institutions devastated by the hurricanes and

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students and fully engaged in assisting their communities.”

The human spirit triumphed in the weeks and months after the hurricanes landed a one-two punch.

“I have never been more proud to be part of Louisiana’s higher education family as I was then. I was proud but I was not surprised. The outpouring of assistance to aid those in need came naturally, because that’s what colleges and universities do.

“Colleges and universities have always served and responded to the needs of their communities because service is a basic responsibility of a university,” Savoie said.

Higher education institutions across the state “accepted, counseled and made special arrangements to enroll nearly

those in New Orleans that were flooded when protective levees broke.

More than 84,000 students were displaced, which is about a third of the total student population. About 15,000 faculty were displaced, as well. Two of the state’s medical schools were closed.

Savoie described the condition of about a dozen institutions in New Orleans after Katrina moved through the Crescent City. Southern University’s entire campus, for instance, was flooded with 8 to 10 feet of water for four weeks. It has set up a temporary campus.

Dillard University’s campus was inundated by 4 to 8 feet of water for six weeks and lost three residence halls to fire. Every building at Nunez Community

## HURRICANES’ TOLL ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN LOUISIANA

**84,058** displaced students  
**15,000** displaced faculty  
**\$154 million** estimated direct revenue loss  
**\$75 million** state budget cut  
**\$400 million to \$500 million** in damage to facilities, infrastructure  
**28,284** enrollment drop in Spring 2006

(Source: Louisiana Board of Regents)

College was flooded by a minimum of 6 feet of water for three weeks.

Universities and colleges in the Bayou State lost about \$150 million of direct revenue from tuition and fees. Also, higher education’s budget was cut by \$75 million due to the catastrophes’ impact on Louisiana’s budget and economy.

Savoie urged the college and university representatives to “prioritize and recognize public service as a major institutional obligation. We have a responsibility to be proactive and responsive to the pressing social, ethical and economic problems facing our communities and society. It shouldn’t take a disaster to remind us of this obligation.”

He offered ways that higher education institutions can “help your students connect to something larger than themselves.”

“When one fifth of America’s children live below the poverty line – the worst record in the developed world – none of us is doing enough.

“Dr. Martin Luther King instructed us that ‘Compassion for the victim along the Jericho Road is not enough. We must transform the Jericho Road.’ After Katrina and Rita, our need for transformation is clear and urgent.” ■